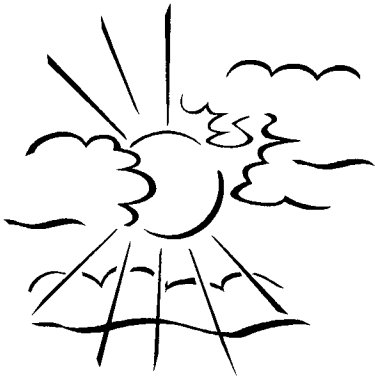


***Department
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, March 20, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Child Abuse/ Neglect/Protection	2-18
Health Care	19-22
Child Support	23-30
Domestic Violence	31-33
Employment	34-35
*Juvenile Justice	36-41
Adoption	42-45
Child Day Care	46
Food Assistance	47
Caseloads	48
Worker Safety	49
Minimum Wage	50-51
Overrepresentation	52

Published March 19, 2006

Abuse of children increases in Mich. Meth, stress of joblessness add to worsening problem

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal

More than 5,000 Michigan kids suffered serious child abuse and neglect last year, and officials say the number and severity of cases are growing.

Protective service workers confirmed 18,110 cases of child maltreatment in fiscal year 2005. That accounted for 28,192 children - up almost 20 percent since 2000.

The cause of much of the increase, officials say, is strain caused by Michigan's stagnant economy and the spread of methamphetamine.

"It's a picture of families under stress," Michigan Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow said. "Our workers are seeing more cases of serious abuse, serious neglect, and it is a huge issue for the community at large to see this volume, this level of cases."

Child abuse has come center stage again with the Ricky Holland case. The 7-year-old Williamston boy's adoptive parents are accused of killing him and dumping his body last July.

Ricky's case has horrified people statewide as details have emerged of previous allegations of abuse, including that his parents withheld food and used a leashlike harness on him.

Those in the trenches say Michigan's children are in increasingly dire situations as families struggle with one of the nation's highest unemployment rates, fewer resources to help them and greater availability of meth, a highly addictive stimulant.

"We've always had some bad cases, but we're seeing more of them now," said Steve Yager, director of the DHS Office of Family Advocate.

"These are life-threatening injuries we're seeing - children with skull fractures, head trauma, broken bones."

Child deaths attributable to abuse or neglect stayed constant, with 52 in both 2000 and 2004, the most recent year for which data is available.

The number of category one cases - those presenting immediate and grave dangers to a child - actually dropped by 279 cases last year to 5,006. But Yager, who couldn't talk about specific cases, said the injuries within that category are growing worse every day.

"We're talking skull fractures as opposed to broken fingers," he said.

Economic stress

Ingham County Family Court Judge George Economy, on the bench for 21 years, said he always sees an uptick in abuse and neglect cases when families face economic stress, particularly those who lose their jobs or are underemployed.

"Parents are at their wits' end," Economy said.

"If you're unemployed and then your kid throws a tantrum, you might lose it."

Rising poverty also means some children enter the system solely because their parents can't afford shelter or clothing or food, said Sharon Claytor Peters, president and chief executive of Michigan's Children, a Lansing-based child advocacy group.

"Neglect is directly related to the material ability to provide for kids," she said.

Nearly three-fourths of all cases in 2005 were for neglect.

Further intensifying the problem are parents who use drugs or alcohol to alleviate their financial stress.

Since Michigan's economy hit the tank in 2001, Judge Economy said he's seen more abuse and neglect cases involving unemployed parents who have become addicts.

"A parent stoned or drunk doesn't use reason when a child does something aggravating," Economy said.

Michigan's spreading methamphetamine epidemic endangers children, Yager said. Since 1997, law enforcement has busted about 56 labs in the tri-county area and more than 990 statewide.

Children were found living in some of the houses, where they were exposed to toxic fumes and residues that can create respiratory problems and ammonia burns.

In those cases, Yager said, parents are usually charged with child abuse. Meth addicts also typically neglect to feed and bathe their children.

Staff reductions

But as caseloads rise, funding cuts have virtually eliminated DHS prevention services targeted at families with unsubstantiated reports of abuse and neglect.

Department staff levels have dropped nearly 20 percent, going from about 13,000 workers to 10,500.

Child Protective Services had about 700 workers to handle 128,884 complaints last year.

Democratic Gov. Jennifer Gran-holm has requested 51 more CPS workers in the 2007 budget now being negotiated with lawmakers. DHS officials say they need about 130 more.

Republican lawmakers question, though, whether such a staffing boost is necessary.

Claytor Peters said the Holland case proves the money is needed.

"If we continue to wait for the next Ricky Holland - and there will be another - we aren't doing anything to help children," Claytor Peters said.

"We need to invest in preventing these tragedies in the first place."

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.

Problem grows

- Ingham County ranked among the 10 worst counties in the state for confirmed abuse and neglect cases in 2004, according to the Kids Count in Michigan Data Book. The annual report found that the number of those cases jumped to 1,037 - up 57 percent - from 1995 to 2004. The rate of children going into foster care was up 22 percent.
- Statewide, confirmed child victims of maltreatment rose more than 40 percent between 1995 and 2004.
- The report is a collaboration between the Michigan League for Human Services and Voices for Michigan's Children, a child advocacy group.

Report abuse

- If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call the state hotline at (800) 942-4357.

Woman pins boy's death on husband

Video shows Lisa Holland's claims

March 18, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

MASON -- A court hearing for a woman accused of murdering her 7-year-old adopted son took a dramatic turn Friday as prosecutors played a video in which she said her husband killed the boy and threatened her, saying if she ever told anyone "that would be the end."

According to the video played in 55th District Court in Mason, Lisa Holland also told sheriff's deputies where they could find her son Ricky's body -- a spot near where the boy's father, Tim Holland, led authorities to his skeletal remains a day after the interview.

Both Tim and Lisa Holland are charged with killing and abusing their son. Each has accused the other in his death.

In a 5 1/2 -hour video recording of the Jan. 26 interrogation by the Ingham County Sheriff's Department, detectives urged Lisa Holland to tell the truth about what happened to Ricky, who was reported missing July 2.

"Come on, Lisa," Detective Roy Holliday urged her on the video. "Just say it. Telling the truth is the easiest thing to do."

Some of the strongest statements were made during the last eight minutes of the video -- after Holland had been told that her lawyer had arrived at the Ingham County Jail.

She said that on the evening of July 1, Tim Holland told her Ricky had vomited in his bedroom and asked her to get paper towels and garbage bags. She told authorities her husband told her not to come into Ricky's room.

Lisa Holland, 33, said she saw her husband take one garbage bag -- filled with what he said was a soiled bed sheet -- and put it in the laundry room. Then she said she watched him carry a large black garbage bag out of the house, and that the bag appeared to have something heavy in it. Saying at first that she didn't know Ricky was dead, she changed her statement later in the interrogation. "Tim took Ricky's body out of the house and he threatened me that if I ever told anybody, that would be the end."

Lisa Holland told detectives that they might find Ricky's body if they searched near Williamston and Ewers roads, about 13 miles south of their home in Leroy Township. Tim Holland, 37, led authorities to the boy's remains in a wetland near the spot on Jan. 27.

Although it was not part of the interrogation shown in court, Detective Brian Valentine said he asked Lisa Holland where police might find evidence of Ricky's blood.

Attributing the blood to nosebleeds, he said, Holland told him to look on a baseboard in the hallway near Ricky's bedroom, on carpet in his bedroom and by the fireplace, where Ricky was disciplined with time-outs.

She also demonstrated on Valentine a chokehold she said her husband would use to discipline Ricky, shoving him against a wall and putting his forearm against the boy's throat.

She said her husband had severe mood swings.

"Tim just snapped," she said on the recording. "His mood would swing like a pendulum. One moment he would be fine, the next moment he would be enraged."

Lisa Holland also blamed one of her four other children for hitting Ricky with a small stainless-steel hammer that has been admitted into evidence in the case.

"One of the kids had a tack hammer and was bopping the other kids on the head with it,"

Valentine said she told him.

Valentine testified that he offered to "go to bat" for Holland and talk with the Department of Human Services about placing the couple's other children with her sister.

But Valentine said he did not talk to the department about the other children. He testified that he told her that to get her to relax and tell the truth about what happened to Ricky.

The preliminary examination is scheduled to continue Tuesday in Judge Rosemarie Aquilina's courtroom. Because of recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, Lisa Holland's statements cannot be used as evidence against her husband. But the recording is admissible as evidence against her.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Lisa Holland: 'I think Tim snapped'

Court views tape of Ricky's mom implicating his dad in boy's death

Published March 18, 2006

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

MASON - Lisa Holland said her husband's moods could "swing like a pendulum" and he may have strangled or suffocated their 7-year-old son after he did something to set him off.

"I think Tim snapped," Lisa Holland said in a Jan. 26 interview with Ingham County sheriff's detectives that was shown in court Friday. "And I think when he snapped, he either laid into Ricky with his weight ... or put an arm up against his neck."

About 10 minutes of the 5 1/2-hour videotaped interview were played on the eighth day of a preliminary hearing that will determine whether the case against the Williamston couple advances to trial.

Tim and Lisa Holland are charged with murder in Ricky's death and also with first-degree child abuse.

The hearing continues Tuesday.

In the taped interview, Lisa Holland said that on the night of July 1, her husband told her that Ricky had thrown up in his room. He asked her to bring garbage bags and told her that he would "take care of it."

Tim Holland went alone into Ricky's bedroom and later emerged carrying garbage bags, she said.

Sitting at a table in a cramped interview room, Lisa Holland buried her head in her arms, then looked up and said: "If I went with my gut instinct, I know what he took out ... would have to be Ricky."

Contradictory testimony

The interview contradicts testimony from a fellow inmate at the Ingham County Jail, who said Lisa Holland told her she killed Ricky by hitting him on the head with a hammer.

The inmate, Crystal Mountain, said Lisa Holland also told her that the boy's body then lay in a hallway of their home for about an hour before she and Tim Holland wrapped it in garbage bags and "Tim placed his body somewhere."

In an interview with authorities on Jan. 27 - the day after Lisa's videotaped interview - Tim Holland implicated Lisa in Ricky's death. That same day, he led police to Ricky's remains in a rural area near Dansville.

Ingham County sheriff's Detective Brian Valentine testified Friday that Lisa Holland initiated the videotaped interview on Jan. 26.

She asked to meet with police, saying she was concerned the couple's four children were about to be placed with Tim Holland's family. She wanted them placed with her sister.

At the time, Lisa Holland was about to be arraigned on charges she assaulted her husband.

Valentine said he promised Lisa Holland he would "go to bat" for her and relay her concerns to Department of Human Services officials, which he acknowledged was an interview tactic to get her to talk.

Under cross-examination from Lisa Holland's co-counsel Mike Nichols, Valentine admitted that people being questioned by police will say things that are not true just to please officers.

Nichols asked for Lisa Holland's videotaped interview to be suppressed, saying her statements were coerced.

But District Judge Rosemarie Aquilina allowed the statements, saying Lisa Holland "knowingly, intelligently, voluntarily and freely" talked to police.

Room cleaned

At the end of his questioning in court Friday, Nichols asked Valentine if investigators had ruled out Tim Holland as a suspect in Ricky's death. Later, Tim Holland's attorney Frank Reynolds asked Valentine if they had ruled out Lisa Holland.

Both times, Valentine responded: "No, we have not."

Also during Friday's testimony, it was revealed that the Hollands hired a company to clean Ricky's room shortly after he went missing in July.

Valentine said the Hollands told him it was to clean out fingerprint dust that police had used while searching the home.

Valentine also testified that during a September 2005 search of the Hollands' Williamston home, Ricky's clothing was found inside a diaper bag Lisa Holland tried to take with her.

She denied knowing how the clothing, which was cut up in pieces and sealed in a plastic sandwich bag, got there, Valentine said.

Near the end of the videotaped interview, Lisa Holland began crying and said: "Tim took Ricky's body out of the house, and he threatened me that if I ever told anybody, that would be the end."

Valentine said he didn't believe it was real emotion because at one point she "just turned off her tears at the snap of (a finger)."

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Monday, March 20, 2006

The Detroit News

Letters

Adopted foster child's death provides lessons

Don't fear intact families

Thank you to Richard Wexler for his column on the tragic and unnecessary death of adoptee Ricky Holland, another casualty of the adoption/foster care industry ("'Family last' policy may have killed Ricky," March 8).

Somehow, our country has developed a hatred and fear of the natural biological family and, at the same time, a near worship of adoption. This makes no sense. The majority of people who adopt children are simply people who wished to have biological children but were unable to. They are not superior people.

Heritage is not replaceable: Families are not interchangeable and children should remain in their natural biological families whenever possible.

*K. M. Kottmeier
Parker, Colo.*

Children need foster parents

While we grieve for 7-year-old Ricky Holland and all of the other children hurt by those who are entrusted with their care, we must find the strength to remember that within tragedy lies opportunity.

There is always a need for capable, loving foster parents. There are few greater gifts that can be given to a child who has experienced abuse and neglect than the gift of a home. More than 18,000 foster care children across Michigan are in desperate need of a safe home, where love is a value, not a reward, and where the necessities are provided by well-trained and well-intentioned people of character.

The responsibility of protecting children like Ricky Holland lies in every citizen. The ultimate truth is that there is something each and every one of us can do to change the lives of troubled children for the better, and the help we can give can't wait.

*Dr. Martin L. Mitchell
President and CEO
Starr Commonwealth
Albion*

Punish incompetent agencies

As painful as it is to read the horrific and pitiful life little Ricky Holland lived, I'm thankful The Detroit News is providing the facts about this little boy. The community needs to know how irresponsible our state agencies (the Department of Human Services; Department of Corrections) are. We need to expose them and hold them accountable when they don't do the jobs we, as taxpayers, are entrusting them with.

No wonder the state of Michigan is failing. We have no leadership at the state level, and it's gotten to the point where it can no longer be hidden.

Hopefully, state of Michigan employees will get trained, have their performance reviewed and documented, be held accountable for their mistakes or sloppiness or, as in a regular business, get fired. They are dealing with people's lives.

Penny Fontichiaro
Northville

Couple arrested in baby's death

Monday, March 20, 2006

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

The parents of a 2-month-old San Marcos, Texas, girl who died March 11 were arrested Friday night in Holland and charged with murder.

Cipriano Gonzales IV, 23, and Esther Marie Gonzales, 23, were arrested by police from Holland and San Marcos, Texas.

The infant, Cynthea Gonzales, died at Central Texas Medical Center in San Marcos. An autopsy showed she died of severe head trauma, including a fractured skull.

The baby also showed evidence of multiple healed rib fractures, police said.

Cynthea was born Jan. 4 at Holland Hospital. Police said the parents moved to San Marcos with the baby and their 3-year-old daughter March 3. After the baby's death, they returned to Michigan.

The parents are being held in the Holland police lockup. The 3-year-old daughter is in the custody of relatives in Holland.

Police investigate baby's death

Sunday, March 19, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Police are investigating the death of a 5-week-old boy at a home on Franklin Street SE.

While there was no immediate indication of foul play, the Grand Rapids Police Department declined to release any additional information about the death while the investigation was taking place.

The death was reported about 1 p.m. Saturday. An autopsy is scheduled for Monday.

Man pleads guilty to assault in case involving 4-year-old

Saturday, March 18, 2006

Gazette Staff Reports

ALLEGAN -- A Plainwell man accused of abusing his girlfriend's 4-year-old son pleaded guilty Thursday in Allegan County Circuit Court to a charge of assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder, authorities said.

Thomas Webb, 33, was arrested after the boy was treated in July at Bronson Methodist Hospital for a ruptured bowel, according to the Plainwell Department of Public Safety.

Webb reportedly dropped the boy off at the boy's father's home July 29. A short time later, police said, the father noticed the boy was becoming ill and took him to the hospital.

Police said doctors described the boy's injuries as "high-impact trauma to his bowel area."

Webb also pleaded guilty to being a habitual offender, police said. He faces up to 15 years in prison at his sentencing, scheduled for April 21.

As part of Webb's plea, a charge of child abuse was dismissed, authorities said.

Man accused of assaulting 5-year-old girl

Saturday, March 18, 2006

By Scott Hagen
shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A man accused of sexually assaulting a 5-year-old girl was formally charged Friday in Jackson County District Court nearly a month after he was arrested in Tennessee.

Police and prosecutors say Timothy Watson, 46, molested and had intercourse with the Blackman Township girl. He had been living with the girl and her mother at their Lansing Avenue house after his release from prison in December.

Watson faces one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and will appear in court March 27 for a preliminary examination, when a judge will rule if there is enough evidence to proceed to a trial.

He said in court Friday that he left for Tennessee shortly after the alleged assault to visit his younger brother, who was dying of cancer.

"The only reason I went down there was to see him before he died," said Watson, who sported the standard orange jail jumpsuit, straggly brown hair past his shoulders and a white mustache. After he left for Tennessee, the girl's mother became aware that Watson may have assaulted her. The girl later told her mother and officers from the Blackman Township Department of Public Safety that Watson touched her often when the mother wasn't home, police said.

The girl also told police that Watson bought her Barbie dolls and often took her to McDonald's when they were alone, and that on at least one occasion he had intercourse with her.

The Citizen Patriot does not publish names of alleged sex assault victims.

Watson was arrested Feb. 23 when he attempted to register as a sex offender in Carroll County, Tenn. He eventually waived his extradition and was delivered to Michigan on Thursday through a service that escorts detainees from state to state.

Magistrate Fred Bishop set a \$750,000 bond for Watson, who is unemployed with no family in the area.

"Ain't no reason giving me that much," Watson said with a southern drawl while he appeared by video for his arraignment. "I couldn't afford it if it were two cents."

Woman appeals kidnap conviction to high court

Saturday, March 18, 2006

By Steven Hepker
shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

A former Concord woman who was convicted of kidnapping her son and hiding him for 15 years has appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Terese Moler, formerly Terese Mason, faces a daunting task: The high court tackles about 75 of the 10,000 appeals it receives annually, Jackson County Assistant Prosecutor Jerrold Schrotenboer said.

The Supreme Court generally addresses cases with broad impact, such as eminent domain in 2005.

The Moler case is an unpublished Michigan Court of Appeals decision upholding her conviction for parental kidnapping.

Schrotenboer said the federal court likely would rule on hearing the petition in June, at the end of the current session.

The Michigan Supreme Court decided Feb. 1 against hearing the appeal.

Moler fled Michigan with 3-year-old Jacob in 1987, after claiming her estranged husband, Joseph Mason, sexually assaulted the boy and was a devil worshipper.

Those accusations were never substantiated by social workers or the court.

Prosecutors said Moler either invented the claims or convinced herself her husband was evil.

When a team of psychologists recommended placing the boy in foster care and giving both parents time with Jacob, Mason fled Michigan with her son.

Her family and friends funded her travels and a lifestyle that included living in expensive resort communities in several western states, private schooling for the boy and 15 years without a job. Moler changed her name and eventually remarried.

She returned to Jackson County in 2002 when Jacob turned 18 and was jailed briefly when she refused to tell authorities where Jacob was living.

A jury found her guilty of parental kidnapping in September 2005. She served an additional 60 days in jail for the crime.

Joseph Mason has not seen his son since Jacob was 3, except for a glimpse of him when he testified at trial.

Sunday, March 19, 2006

Michigan agenda

State may toughen penalty for sex crime

Senate considers bill to impose 25-year term on adults convicted of assault on pre-teens.

Charlie Cain / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

March 19, 2006

LANSING -- An adult convicted of first-degree sexual conduct against a child under 13 would receive a mandatory 25-year prison sentence and, upon release from prison, the offender would be forced to wear a satellite tether for life, under legislation before the Senate.

By near unanimous votes, the House last week approved the four-bill package. It's being called "Jessica's Law" because the legislation was inspired by Jessica Lunsford, a 9-year-old Florida girl who last year was kidnapped, repeatedly raped for three days and then buried alive by a known sex offender who had moved into her neighborhood without alerting local authorities of his whereabouts, as required by law.

The girl's body was found near her Florida home three weeks after her abduction.

Before Tuesday's vote, the girl's father, Mark Lunsford, traveled to Lansing to testify before the House Judiciary Committee, urging adoption of the package.

"We depend on you people," said Lunsford, who has appeared in front of lawmakers in a dozen states. "You have the power to change this. I live with this every day."

Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, is chief sponsor of two of the bills.

"This is a good package of bills that will help protect kids, and I hope the Senate will move on this as quickly as possible," said Law, a former assistant Oakland County prosecutor.

"We heard testimony that the average pedophile has 100 victims. If that person is in prison for 25 years, we might save 99 other kids," he said.

Law said Oakland County has five prosecutors who work full-time on sexual molestation cases.

"The sad thing is that they are kept busy, which should serve as a wake-up call that there is a problem out there that we can't run away from," he said.

Law's bills would require released sex offenders to wear a tether that would allow them to be tracked by real-time global positioning technology.

If a child were abducted or molested, it would allow law enforcement to immediately determine where known child sex offenders were at the time.

The package has been criticized by some as unnecessary since Michigan judges and parole board members already deal harshly with sex offenders who prey on children. Law dismisses the suggestion that the legislation is overly harsh.

"What would be draconian would be us not wanting to take a step like this that we know will genuinely protect our kids," he said.

You can reach Charlie Cain at (313) 222-2470 or ccain@detnews.com

`Lifesavers' need volunteers

Monday, March 20, 2006

The Kalamazoo Gazette

The Kalamazoo County Child Abuse and Neglect Council announced that it needs volunteers for its annual ``Be a Lifesaver" campaign, which takes place from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. April 7 and 8. It is one of many awareness campaigns across the country recognizing April as National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Lifesaver volunteers will hand out a roll of Lifesavers candy in exchange for donations. Call 269-552-4430 by next Sunday to volunteer.

Drug copay ruling poor 'a big relief'

Saturday, March 18, 2006

SUSAN J. DEMAS
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Jeanette K. Beeker used to dread when she emptied her 10 prescription bottles because she didn't have the cash to cover the copay on refills.

"It's not an easy thing to say, 'I don't have \$1 or \$3' -- even if it's true," said Beeker, 67, of Saginaw. "When you don't have enough money, you don't have to feel any more demoralized." Last month, the retiree and 1.5 million other Medicaid recipients got some welcome news when U.S. District Judge David Lawson ruled that pharmacists can't refuse to fill a prescription for those unable to afford the copay.

The Saginaw-based Center for Civil Justice filed the suit in April 2005 on behalf of Beeker and three Flint Medicaid recipients, Charles Lewis, Henry Lewis and Cindy Baliko. They sued state Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski after the Legislature in 2004 raised the copay on some prescriptions from \$1 to \$3 for those on Medicaid.

The ruling means Beeker never again will have to go without medication for hypertension, bipolar disorder and arthritis. If patients can't make the copay, they do have to repay the pharmacy later, the ruling states.

Beeker since has transferred from Medicaid to Medicare but said the victory "still came as a big relief."

Copays might seem small, but they can add up quickly for poor patients who take multiple medications, said Beeker's attorney, Jacqueline Doig.

"People will get the medication when they need it so it can prevent more serious health problems," Doig said.

"That means we'll have less people in the emergency rooms and psychiatric hospitals, which costs us all money."

Medicaid recipients won a similar case last year in Minnesota, *Dahl v. Goodno*.

The state has appealed the decision to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. The ruling does not impact state Medicaid spending, but it does squeeze pharmacies.

Pharmacist Matthew Pflighaar said for his Bay City business, Southside Pharmacy, 1002 Lafayette, the loss of small copays "isn't going to be a huge loss, but it does add up."

"I don't know if it sends a good message," Pflighaar said. "The rules were passed to have some charge so people weren't just running in every time they have a cold."

To qualify for Medicaid, a single person must make less than \$9,576 annually; a family of three must earn less than \$8,280.

Michigan law does not require people who say they can't afford the copay to provide pharmacists with proof that they're on Medicaid.

Pharmacists do have the right to collect copays owed by Medicaid recipients and may take debtors to small claims court.

Kalamazoo Gazette Letters

March 19, 2006

Drug plan must be changed

The new Medicare Prescription Drug Plan is worse than having no plan at all. I'm urging everyone to write, fax or e-mail our elected officials.

We need to get this plan changed. The only people who will benefit from this program are the drug companies and the insurance companies. I have contacted 18 different companies and they are all the same.

Medicare has decided with the insurance companies which drugs will or will not be covered, and there are many that are not covered. This is not only going to affect retirees but also people who are working and people with company insurance plans.

Also, if you don't sign up by May 15, you can be fined for each month you wait.

I took a veteran to the veteran's medical facility in Battle Creek for a doctor's appointment. I was talking to another veteran and a nurse overheard our conversation. She gave me a letter and said people should contact our elected officials and newspapers.

She said they are telling veterans not to sign up for Medicare Part D. Please do what you can to help us.

Marlene Shutes
Kalamazoo

Congressman offers Medicare drug assistance

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

HOLLY TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, March 18, 2006

By Marjory Raymer

mraymer@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6325

HOLLY TWP. - Local residents can find out more about the new Medicare prescription drug benefit and get help at a forum hosted by U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton.

The event is Wednesday at the Holly Township Library, 1116 N. Saginaw. A public discussion is from 1-2 p.m. followed by individual counseling from 2-4 p.m.

Registration is required for individual counseling. Call (800) 852-7795 for an appointment.

The public discussion will feature Rogers and Medicare experts.

Rogers also is hosting similar events next week in Perry, Mason and St. Johns.

A simpler plan

Saturday, March 18, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

There is no question that adjustments are needed in the federal government's new Medicare prescription drug benefit plan. The needlessly complex and mind-numbing array of choices have left many senior citizens dumbfounded about which plan to choose. But extending the deadline for enrollment, as some lawmakers are suggesting, won't make the choice any easier, or fix what ails the drug plan.

Extending the May 15 deadline will simply provide more time for seniors to be confused and give insurance companies offering plans more time to bombard them with advertising. In Michigan and most other states, private insurers are offering 40 or more plans that retirees must choose from, with differing co-payments, premiums, deductibles, drugs covered and pharmacies that can fill prescriptions. Choice is good, but there are drawbacks to having too much of a good thing.

Many seniors have tried to decipher their options and have thrown up their hands in dismay. There are currently 42 million Medicare beneficiaries eligible for Part D drug benefit. At the end of February about 6 million had voluntarily enrolled in the program. Another 20 million people were automatically enrolled because they also qualify for Medicaid. About 12 million are expected to keep their existing coverage through current or former employers.

The process of picking a Medicare drug plan can be tedious, but there is help available. Seniors should take advantage of it. In Kent County, the West Michigan Agency on Aging sponsored a clinic along with the Iserv, a local Internet service provider, last week, that provided seniors one-on-one help with the daunting task of choosing a plan. Iserv provided a bank of computers with In-

ternet access. Two more clinics are planned before the May deadline. Seniors are guaranteed to leave the clinic with their choices narrowed down to the three plans that work best for them based on the medicines they are currently taking. The rest is up to them. Medicare regulations prohibit physicians, pharmacists and health-care advocates from helping patients select a specific plan, but help with narrowing the choices is a good starting point.

If Congress is serious about revising the drug benefit plan, making it simpler would be the best medicine. But that's not going to happen in the middle of the first year of the program. Seniors eligible for benefit shouldn't wait for Congress to act. Those who enroll after mid-May will pay a penalty in the form of higher premiums -- for the rest of their lives. A

1 percent penalty will be added to their premiums for every month of enrollment delay.

Premiums can range from a few dollars a month to hundreds a month, depending on the plan.

Those missing the May deadline will have to wait until November to sign-up. Every year, annual enrollment will be in November and December.

Paring the choices available as well as negotiating drug prices for the program are revisions that Congress should work on and have ready for next year. For now, the best course for seniors to take is to sign up for a plan to avoid the late enrollment penalty. Even those who don't use any prescription drugs now, might save in the long run by picking a plan that has a low monthly premium, instead of incurring the late enrollment charge.

No fanfare for child support amnesty results

Saturday, March 18, 2006

By Sharon Emery

MLIVE

There's general frustration in the Legislature about not being able to squeeze blood out of a rock. Take the \$9 billion due Michigan's children by parents delinquent on their child support. Seventy-seven percent of that is owed by parents making less than \$10,000 a year. This is not a likely group to recover money from, Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support, told the House Appropriations subcommittee on human services at a recent budget hearing. Not that she isn't trying; her office collected nearly \$1.5 billion last year.

But it rankles because dereliction of parental duty flies in the face of what should be.

"People have obligations when they bring children into the world," grumbled Rep. Bruce Caswell, R-Hillsdale, who's been known to pop a cork when it comes to the budget.

Results of the state's latest child support amnesty program are a case in point.

Michigan parents behind on child support were given the opportunity during a three-month period late last year to pay what they owed and the state would forgive the late fees or other penalties -- including jail time -- they had wracked up.

Some 422,000 delinquent parents were eligible to participate.

Nineteen did -- 19. If you were in any other business, you might call that disappointing.

Still, the effort produced \$159,590 for the families, three of which received over \$40,000 each.

"When someone can send a check of that size to a family that's not expecting it, that's a very good day for child support collection," said Stephen, who called it "thrilling."

For Caswell? Not so much.

"Here's what I struggle with..." Caswell ruminated. "I think we've closed the barn door after the horses have gone."

He blames the whopping child support debt on bad personal choices. "It's difficult to change behavior, but we have to," Caswell told Stephen, whose office is in the Michigan Department of Human Services.

"If we're working to put out programs telling people it's wrong to be obese or to smoke...why isn't your department putting out service ads saying it's wrong to have kids out of wedlock and wrong to divorce?" Formulating a catchy billboard message that could make people good parents might be tricky, Rep. Chris Kolb, D-Ann Arbor, noted.

But that wasn't the only thing riling Caswell and his colleague, Rep. Jerry Kooiman, R-Grand Rapids.

They questioned whether the state was trying hard enough to collect overdue child support.

"What's holding us back from going at this through private collections?" Kooiman wanted to know.

"...We're not using every tool in the toolbox."

Stephen said she'd be agreeable to a pilot project using private collection agencies. But she indicated that the key value of private collectors -- their ability to track down reluctant payers -- was not really needed, since the state already knows where the debtors are.

It's just that the average amount owed is \$14,000, and for low-income person it would take 23 years to pay off.

"But even at those low income levels, support is ordered and some do make child support payments, so it wouldn't be appropriate to conclude that all these arrears are uncollectible," Stephen told me in an e-mail.

Anyway, hope springs eternal. A new program, the Michigan Arrears Collection Special Project, started Feb. 1. Some 26,000 parents who have made a payment in the last two years -- and so are considered good prospects -- have been sent letters notifying them that they're eligible to pay up by April 30.

If they pay 100 percent of past-due support and fees owed to the custodial parent, then 75 percent of what they owe the state -- for welfare assistance the family may have received, for instance -- will be forgiven.

"The money is coming in a bit slowly," Stephen told lawmakers, but she expects it to pick up once parents who owe larger amounts have time to secure loans.

Contact Sharon Emery at (517) 487-8888 x236 or e-mail her at semery@boothnewspapers.com.

Duped 'dads' seek relief

Legislation would reform rules on who pays child support to protect men forced to provide for nonbiological kids.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News
March 20, 2006

Over 15 years, Doug Richardson shelled out an estimated \$80,000 in child support for a boy who genetic tests have shown is not biologically his.

To make matters worse, he says he's had to pay support to his ex-wife and the boy's biological father when the two were together -- then to the biological father after the couple split.

"This has torn me up for 15 years," said Richardson, 40, who has been trying to get a judge to free him of his court-ordered payments. "I've had to file bankruptcy. I have back taxes. It has destroyed my life."

Richardson is heading to court this week to change a situation that activists say numerous men face. Bills in the state Legislature seek to provide relief, including one that would require courts to withdraw child support orders when DNA tests prove that people are paying support to children who aren't biologically theirs. Similar laws have been passed in at least 12 states.

For now, the issue is in the hands of family court judges who make decisions based on the child's best interests. Many fathers say judges aren't on their side, even when science is.

It is devastating for fathers to learn that a child they loved as their own is not theirs, say those who support changes in state law. But, to require these men to be financially obligated is morally wrong and is similar to jailing innocent people who have been set free in recent years by DNA tests, they say.

"New laws are desperately needed in Michigan to provide protection and relief to men who have been duped, unintentionally or not, by mothers who choose who they wish to be the legal fathers of their children," said Murray Davis, a Southfield activist and father. "Michigan remains among a group of unenlightened states that continue to 'aid and abet' fraudulent paternity establishments."

Issue is complex

Groups that work on behalf of women receiving child support agree this is a complex issue that can be unfair to the father and child. But they worry most about the children.

"Obviously, if someone is not the father of a child, they should not be financially obligated to pay," said Debbie Klein of the Virginia-based Association for Children for the Enforcement of Support. "But how can a judge order someone not to pay child support and know that child is going to be plunged into poverty?"

"This is an issue where there is no one correct answer."

But there is a simple solution, said Davis, who founded DADS of Michigan after he fought having to pay child support to his ex-wife when he learned his former best friend fathered two of their three children during their 18-year marriage.

The mother should be required to identify the biological father, so he can pay the child support, he said.

The putative father should be given the option to continue his relationship as a dad without financial obligation. And, the child should be told the truth about who the biological father is, Davis said.

"The state of Michigan should be holding the mothers accountable," he said. "But, they don't do that."

'It's an injustice'

Rep. LaMar Lemmons III, D-Detroit, has introduced legislation for the second time to address this issue. Though a bill he introduced two years ago died in a Senate committee, he hopes this time it has a better chance of passing.

"It's an injustice to be forced to pay for a child that isn't yours," he said.

Child support was created for children from broken families so they wouldn't have to live in poverty. A noncustodial parent, who most often is the father, is required to pay the support until the child reaches 18 or graduates from high school, whichever occurs later.

A man becomes a legal father in Michigan when he is married to the mother at conception or birth or signs a voluntary affidavit of parentage, typically at the hospital when the child is born, said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support in the Michigan Department of Human Services.

In cases in which it is uncertain who the father is when a child is conceived out of wedlock, a mother can file a paternity lawsuit against the man in question. He is given the option of taking a genetic test to establish paternity. If the tests show the man is not the father, the suit is dismissed. When the test shows that the man is the father, an order for child support follows.

There were 9,700 genetic tests administered last year to establish paternity, the results of which eliminated 27 percent of the men who were thought to be the parents of children conceived out of wedlock, according to the Office of Child Support. Cases seeking child support orders were dismissed against those men.

But those genetic tests were done on one-fifth of the 46,000 children born out of wedlock last year. The majority of those births were acknowledged by both parents, and fathers groups say most of the time there's no DNA testing.

Stephen said she is aware there are some cases of men paying child support for children who are not biologically theirs, but her office doesn't track them. She suspects there aren't many among the state's million cases of child support orders.

Finding out by accident

Activists for fathers, however, believe there are more cases of paternity fraud than are reported, pointing out that DNA tests are done on only a fraction of people who bear children every year. Often, fathers just don't know and find out by accident.

That was the case for Shane Shamie, a Rockwood man who was married for nearly 10 years before he found out the daughter they had four years into their marriage wasn't his.

"My heart sank," said Shamie, who had a DNA test to confirm his suspicions that he wasn't the biological father. Still, he has continued to support his daughter financially and emotionally since divorcing her mother.

"When you are in a position like I've been put in, a person has to make a decision that's not in your own best interests," said Shamie. "It's in the best interest of your kids."

Other fathers, like Michael Williams of Detroit, agree they don't mind being a parent to a child they raised, but they want out of their financial obligation.

"I don't think it's fair for me to be held responsible for children who are not mine," said Williams, who had seven children with his high school sweetheart, whom he married. But, he later learned through DNA tests that only two of the children are his. It's unfair to financially support a child that is not yours, Richardson said.

He was a father for less than five years when he learned his son wasn't his biological child. Richardson got married when he was 19 after his then-girlfriend told him she was pregnant with his child. The couple had a second son during the marriage who is biologically Richardson's.

Richardson learned before their divorce that another man was the father of the first son, and DNA tests confirmed it in 1992. Richardson's ex-wife declined to comment.

Her attorney, Robert Dunn of Bay City, said too much time has elapsed for Richardson to get any relief. "It is strong public policy in Michigan to quickly resolve the issue of parentage and not allow the issue to dangle for years and years. It's unfair to the children."

Richardson said he is also working to change the laws so other men don't go through what he has endured.

"This has got to come to an end," he said. "It's just a continuing case of fraud that is costing me dearly."

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Saturday, March 18, 2006

Reader Debate

Do men have right to avoid financial support?

A man has the same legal responsibilities as a woman, so why shouldn't he be entitled to the same rights? If men have no rights in a pregnancy, how can women argue that they are equally responsible? You can't continue to have it both ways, ladies. It's time to recognize men's rights, along with their responsibilities.

Brian Pannebecker

Shelby Township

Just why is parent financial responsibility toward a child so clear for some fathers yet cloudy for others? If a man doesn't want fatherhood, then don't take the risk that could lead to it. Be a man if a child comes from lovemaking and do the right thing: Provide support for the little one.

Louis La Londe

Sault Sainte Marie

It takes two to tango. If you have sex and are stupid enough not to use birth control, then as a man you are responsible. You can't penalize women because nature made them the ones who get pregnant.

Kristine Rose

Mount Clemens

Although these fathers who don't want their children are the exception, they should not be allowed to legally opt out of their financial responsibilities.

Jack Bernard Rhodes

Riverview

A "men's version of Roe v. Wade" is a bad idea because it would give potential deadbeat dads another excuse to shirk parental and sexual responsibility.

Martin Yanosek

St. Clair Shores

It's about time. Women have the ability to say no and keep their pants zipped, just like men. But if they end up pregnant, they can abort or not. They aren't forced to pay for their indiscretions. Even if the child is born, women have the choice to keep it, give the baby up for adoption or even leave it at a hospital or police station -- "no questions asked." Men have none of these options, but are forced to support the baby if the mother so decides.

Brad Carson

Pontiac

The guys should have known the outcome of their actions when they enticed the gals and have no excuse for nonsupport. They are just as responsible for the care and support of the child as the females since it takes both to produce a child.

Dee Macko

Misery Bay

If the self-centered "I have control over both my destiny and the consequences of my actions" attitude is the one we wish to embrace in our society (as the majority of abortions seem to be the result of), is this not a next logical step? Perhaps we should re-evaluate our affair with abortion altogether.

Kevin Wells

Dearborn Heights

So the arrogant guy says he has no options? Try no sex. Or at least have the intelligence to use a condom. And accept your due responsibility to support the child if the woman gets pregnant.

J.J. Novak

Farmington Hills

Lansing State Journal Letters

March 18, 2006

Grow up, boy

I was so incensed by the March 9 article, "Man suing for right to decline fatherhood," that I am compelled to write.

This "man" (and I use that term loosely) wants the right to decline financial responsibility for a child he fathered with an ex-girlfriend. He goes on to indicate that men have no rights in reproductive choices.

They certainly do! They can choose to wear a condom, be selective of their sexual partners or abstain. Denying financial responsibility after the fact is absurd. This "boy" needs to grow up and remember the old saying, "You play, you pay." This state does not need another woman and child living in poverty because of some deadbeat dad.

Melissa Hulbert-Chapman
Lansing

Lansing State Journal Letters

March 18, 2006

Kids come second

It is about time the men in this country finally smartened up and filed a lawsuit concerning their lack of reproductive rights.

Women have been whining for years about their rights. Heaven forbid that couples work together and assume responsibility for the best interests of the fetus they created. Mom and Pop come first, and to heck with anyone else.

Of course, if people really loved children instead of their genes, there would be no need for so-called reproductive rights.

Fran Donbrosky

Lansing

Op-Ed

When Words Bear Witness

By MICHAEL RIPS and AMY LESTER
The New York Times

Published: March 20, 2006

THE Supreme Court is scheduled to hear oral arguments today in two cases that may make domestic violence cases all but impossible to prosecute. The cases, *Davis v. Washington* and *Hammon v. Indiana*, raise the question of whether statements made to 911 operators can be admitted in prosecutions if those who made the calls refuse to appear in court. Such evidence has become crucial in bringing domestic abusers to justice.

Domestic violence accounts for up to 34 percent of all reported violent crimes, but it is notoriously difficult to prosecute, because victims frequently drop charges or refuse to testify when their abusers threaten them with further violence. In the 1980's and 1990's, the refusal of victims to cooperate in the prosecution of their batterers may have resulted in the dismissal of as many as 70 percent of all domestic violence cases.

In recent years, however, prosecutors, police officers and advocates for domestic violence victims have developed techniques, together known as "evidence-based prosecution," that focus on the use of reliable evidence, like 911 tapes, to build cases that do not depend on the cooperation of the victim. In San Diego, the City Attorney's domestic violence unit uses evidence-based prosecution, and it obtains convictions in about 88 percent of its cases. In a typical six month period in the old days, the unit's conviction rate was just 12 percent.

But evidence-based prosecution suffered a major setback in 2004. That year, in *Crawford v. Washington*, the Supreme Court held that if witness statements were "testimonial" in nature, they could not be introduced unless the witness was available for cross-examination by the defendant. The court deferred the question of exactly what types of statements should be considered "testimonial." That is the matter at the heart of the two cases now before the court.

A significant number of courts have interpreted *Crawford* to bar the use of 911 tapes and answers to questions posed by police officers unless the witness is available for cross-examination. In so doing, they've overturned convictions in cases of domestic battery. In a survey of more than 60 prosecutors in California, Oregon and Washington, 63 percent said that *Crawford* hampered the prosecution of domestic violence; 76 percent reported that they'd grown more likely to drop domestic violence charges when they encountered uncooperative witnesses; and 65 percent said that *Crawford* had made domestic violence victims less safe than they were before. Reports from other jurisdictions echo these findings.

If the Supreme Court, in deciding *Davis* and *Hammon*, adopts a definition of "testimonial" that includes statements made by victims to 911 operators or to officers arriving at the scene of the abuse, prosecutors will face some undesirable options in domestic violence cases. They can refuse to bring cases in which the victim won't testify; or they can try to force the victim to

testify. The latter is no solution because it would entail subjecting abuse victims to state-imposed sanctions, including jail time.

This is why, in answering the question left open by Crawford, the court should not define "testimonial" in a way that restricts the use of out-of-court statements made by victims to 911 operators or police officers at the scene of the crime. Without access to such evidence, the criminal justice system may be rendered virtually incapable of protecting victims of domestic violence and of holding their batterers accountable.

Michael Rips and Amy Lester are lawyers representing a coalition of nonprofit organizations that protect women and children from domestic violence.

Judge Charges Man Who Is Not In Custody

Search Continues For Suspect

POSTED: 6:10 pm EST March 17, 2006

The search continues for the man who police say drove his white Envoy into the Kroger grocery store in Royal Oak Township Thursday.

Although police do not have Keith Johnson in custody, a judge proceeded to charge him with murder, according to police.

Johnson has a history of arrests, including unarmed robbery, drug charges and domestic violence. A court order prohibiting Johnson contact with his former girlfriend didn't stop him, as he went to her Oak Park home, allegedly beat her and then burned her belongings, police said.

After the attack at the home, police said Johnson forced his girlfriend and two of their three children into the SUV and drove to the Kroger, where he said he would kill her.

Police recovered the SUV in Detroit on Friday, but they continue to search for the suspect.

Johnson has been spotted twice in the Detroit area. If you have any information or have spotted him, call (888) TURN-1-IN.

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MIRS
Friday, March 17, 2006

January Jobless Rates Up Across All 17 Regions

Regardless of what region you looked at in January, jobless rates rose, according to data released today by the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG).

The regional jobless rate increases ranged from a low of 0.2 percent to a high of 1.3 percentage points with an average increase of 0.6 percent. The largest increases took place in the Monroe area and the Northeast Lower Michigan region.

The smallest over-the-month rate hikes took place in the Muskegon, Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids areas.

Since January 2005, all 17 of the state's regions saw jobless rates decline. The declines ranged from 0.4 percent to 1.7 percent with an average decline of a full percentage point. Significant over-the-year jobless rate drops were recorded in Saginaw, Benton Harbor, Bay City and Muskegon areas. Seven other regions registered declines of a percentage point or more.

"Labor market activity was fairly typical throughout the state in January with the dominating seasonal patterns of unemployment rate hikes and job cutbacks," said Rick **WACLAWEK**, director of the Bureau of Labor Market Information & Strategic Initiatives. "However, since January 2005, employment growth and concurrent unemployment declines were the hallmarks in the majority of Michigan's regional labor market areas."

REPORT NO. --, VOLUME 35

Michigan Report

March 17, 2006

REGIONAL JOBLESS RATES GO UP

While the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate declined in January, the unadjusted rate increased in all of the state's 17 labor market areas, according to figures released Friday by the Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

While the January rates were up in the labor markets, they were down in each market compared to January 2005.

The biggest increase in regional joblessness from December to January was in northeast lower Michigan, where the unemployment rate jumped from 8.9 percent to 10.2 percent. The region had the highest unemployment in the state that month.

Ann Arbor had the lowest unemployment at 4.2 percent in January, although that was up by .4 percent from December.

Unemployment in the Detroit-Warren-Livonia area jumped from 6.7 percent in December to 7.6 percent.

In counties, Washtenaw had the lowest unemployment at 4.2 percent, while Mackinac County had the highest at 19.7 percent. Wayne County had an unemployment rate of 8.9 percent.

Published March 18, 2006

Highfields cited for violations 'Substantial' problems found, but state not releasing details

By Steve Miller
Lansing State Journal

The state Department of Human Services has cited Highfields Inc. for a number of violations, according to board members at Highfields and state officials.

The sanctions are contained in an investigative report sent Friday to the Onondaga-based social services agency, which operated a residential program for troubled youth.

"I understand there are citations issued pertaining to incidents here," said Highfields Board Member Brian Cavanaugh. "And it's our sincere desire to do whatever we have to in order to satisfy the state."

Two employees in the Highfields' youth care program were fired last month after an investigation found they had taken a resident outside in frigid weather without a coat.

Follow-up inquiries found other incidents of possible mistreatment.

Both the state and Ingham County removed all of their children in Highfields' youth care program amid mounting allegations of misconduct and poor training practices.

State spokeswoman Karen Stock confirmed that Highfields was cited for "substantial multiple rule violations." She said the DHS report will be available within 10 days.

The citations, which the members and the DHS spokeswoman would not detail, give Highfields a set amount of time to remedy the problems, said Highfields Board Chairman Charles Corley.

"We will correct our problems and be a better organization for having gone through this," Corley said.

In the wake of the state investigation and its citations, staffing changes and vast policy retooling are possible, Cavanaugh said.

"We are going to have to address staffing, as well as everything else," he said. "Nothing is off the table."

Three weeks ago, the Highfields board promised a panel of Ingham County judges who have referred youths to the agency that it would devise a corrective action plan.

Cavanaugh said Highfields is waiting for the plan to be reviewed by an expert, "to ensure that our policies and practices are the best they can be."

The report for the judges will be finalized after that review, which is expected to take place in the next week or so, he said.

The board also was waiting for the state's investigation, he added, in hopes that it would shed additional light on possible remedies.

Meanwhile, the judges wonder where the corrective action plan is, and they are ready to seek other agencies in which to place troubled youngsters.

The county stopped using Highfields, removing its 18 boys and losing an option for residential treatment.

"We have kids that need care and we are investigating other facilities to use," said Ingham County Probate Judge Richard Garcia. "We lost our short-term relief."

That said, Garcia - a longtime advocate for Highfields - is hopeful the agency will right the ship.

"I would love to use it," Garcia said. "A lot of kids have been helped at Highfields."

Also last week, a report compiled by several Ingham County judges was turned over to the state and the Highfields board for review.

In that confidential report obtained by the Lansing State Journal, several Highfields employees allege numerous cases of malfeasance, including the backdating of incident reports and a child in the care of the agency who was hospitalized without notifying any authorizing agencies.

According to one account, as the state began its investigation into Highfields in mid-February, a supervisor backdated incident reports.

The results of a criminal inquiry by the Ingham County Sheriff's Department were turned over to the prosecutor's office last week.

That information, described by a prosecutor as a "fair amount" of material, is being reviewed.

Corley said Highfields would be ready to accept kids after the state and the judges review its plan.

"I would like to think we can be open to kids again in weeks," he said. "But you can never tell."

EDITOR'S NOTE: LSJ Editorial Page Editor Mark Nixon is a member of Highfields' board. To avoid a conflict of interest, Nixon has recused himself from board meetings.

State agency has cited youth camp, Highfields board members say

Midday update

By Steve Miller

Lansing State Journal

March 17, 2006

The state Department of Human Services has cited Highfields, Inc., for a number of violations, according to board members of the Youth Opportunity Camp for troubled teens. The sanctions are contained in an investigative report sent Friday to the Onondaga-based social services agency.

"I understand there are citations issued pertaining to incidents here," said Highfields board member Brian Cavanaugh of the residential treatment program for youth. "And it's our sincere desire to do whatever we have to in order to satisfy the state."

The citations, which the members declined to detail, give Highfields a set amount of time to remedy, said Highfields Board Chairman Charles Corley.

"We will correct our problems and be a better organization for having gone through this," Corley said. "But it has not been a pleasant thing to go through."

A spokeswoman for the agency declined to comment.

Two employees in the Highfields' youth care program were fired last month after a separate investigation found they had taken a resident outside in frigid weather without a coat. Follow-up inquiries found other incidents of alleged mistreatment.

Both the state and Ingham County subsequently removed all of their children in Highland's youth care program amidst mounting allegations of abuse and poor training practices.

Highfields cited for violations

'Substantial' problems found, but state not releasing details

*By Steve Miller
Lansing State Journal
March 18, 2006*

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Two reports on Highfields

- The Department of Human Services would not specify the "substantial multiple rule violations."

Its report will be released within 10 days.

- The Ingham County prosecutor is reviewing the sheriff department's report of its investigation into whether any crimes were committed.

Unwed Fathers Fight for Babies Placed for Adoption by Mothers

By TAMAR LEWIN
The New York Times

Published: March 19, 2006

Jeremiah Clayton Jones discovered that his former fiancée was pregnant just three weeks before the baby was due, when an adoption-agency lawyer called and asked if he would consent to have his baby adopted.

"I said absolutely not," said Mr. Jones, a 23-year-old Arizona man who met his ex-fiancée at Pensacola Christian College in Florida. "It was an awkward moment, hearing for the first time that I would be a father, and then right away being told, 'We want to take your kid away.' But I knew that if I was having a baby, I wanted that baby."

Mr. Jones has never seen his son, now 18 months old. Instead, he lost his parental rights because of his failure to file with a state registry for unwed fathers — something he learned of only after it was too late.

Under Florida law, and that of other states, an unmarried father has no right to withhold consent for adoption unless he has registered with the state putative father registry before an adoption petition is filed. Mr. Jones missed the deadline.

Although one in every three American babies has unwed parents, birth fathers' rights remain an unsettled area, a delicate balancing act between the importance of biological ties and the undisrupted placement of babies whose mothers relinquish them for adoption.

While women have the right to get an abortion, or to have and raise a child, without informing the father, courts have increasingly found that when birth mothers choose adoption, fathers who have shown a desire for involvement have rights, too.

But to claim those rights most states require a father to put his name on a registry. While about 30 states now have registries, they vary widely. In some, fathers must actually claim paternity; in others, just the possibility of paternity. The deadlines may be 5 days after birth or 30, or any time before an adoption petition is filed.

And registries are a double-edged sword: It remains an open question whether they serve more to protect fathers' rights or to protect adoptive parents, and the babies they have bonded with, from biological fathers' claims.

"My specialty is contested adoptions, and the most common contest is where the mom wants to place the baby and the dad objects," said Martin Bauer, president of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys. "Registries can protect men against birth mothers who won't disclose the father's name or actively lie about his identity."

Adam Pertman, executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, a nonprofit research and education group, sees it differently. "It's all smoke and mirrors," Mr. Pertman said. "How can registries work if no one's heard of them? And it's just not reasonable to expect that men will register every time they have sex."

In the early 1990's, the two-year fight over Baby Jessica and the four-year battle over Baby Richard highlighted the wrenching dramas of birth parents winning custody of babies placed

with adoptive parents years earlier. The spectacle of those children being taken from the arms of the only parents they had known raised an outcry about the need for speedy, permanent placement.

While some states have long had putative father registries — New York's registry was upheld by the United States Supreme Court in 1983 — most were started in the last decade to head off late parental claims.

In many states, fewer than 100 men register each year — not surprising, adoption experts say, because most young men have never heard of the registries. One exception is Indiana, where men are notified of the registry when a birth mother names them as the father, and 50 men register a week.

Adoption lawyers say some birth mothers refuse to identify the father to forestall interference. There are no statistics on how many unmarried fathers seek to raise babies the birth mother has relinquished.

Mary Beck, a professor at the University of Missouri School of Law, said the burden of registering should be the father's.

"There are men who complain, 'What, I have to file for every woman I've had sex with?' "

Professor Beck said. "But men are on notice of possible pregnancy by virtue of having had sex, and the alternative is leaving it up to the women to chase them down."

Even for registered men, the system is flawed. Because the registries are state by state, a registration means nothing if the father or mother has moved — or if the baby was surrendered for adoption in a different state specifically to avoid a challenge.

In one case, Frank Osborne of North Carolina challenged his 5-month-old son's adoption in Utah. The Utah Supreme Court rejected Mr. Osborne's claim, but a dissenting judge found it unfair that Mr. Osborne lost a child he had lived with and supported until the mother "unilaterally and clandestinely" took the boy to Utah.

Senator Mary L. Landrieu, Democrat of Louisiana, will address that problem in the Proud Father Act, which would create a national registry and is to be introduced in Congress later this year.

"In a perfect world, everything would be linked so that everyone could find out if a man had registered or filed for paternity," said Jim Outman, a lawyer in Atlanta who consulted on the legislation. "But in the real world, the left hand doesn't always know what the right hand is doing."

"If there's nothing in the records in their county, their state, how is an adoption agency supposed to know there's a father who's going to come forward in two years? There has to be some security for the adoptive parents and the child."

One self-made expert on the registries is Erik L. Smith, an Ohio paralegal who fathered a son in Texas and fought for paternal rights after the baby's placement with an adoptive family. In an unusual resolution, the boy, now 13, lives with the adoptive family, while Mr. Smith, a noncustodial father, has visiting rights. Mr. Smith was naturally intrigued when he heard of the Ohio registry in a class where the professor explained that babies born to unwed parents could be adopted without the father's consent unless he registered within 30 days after the birth.

"I asked if that meant that, to protect his rights, a man should register every time he has sex with a new partner, and he said yes," Mr. Smith said.

So he tried. "I called information and asked how I could contact the Ohio putative father registry, but there was no listing," Mr. Smith said. "I searched the Internet but couldn't find any address."

While Ohio's system has improved, he said, "as long as registries aren't publicized, I think they just work as a way to get rid of fathers like me."

Glenn Spraggs, a 22-year-old Cincinnati man, was recently caught short by ignorance of the Ohio registry. His girlfriend, Sharicka Watson, had a baby boy, Thomas, on Dec. 2, and Mr. Spraggs, who also has a daughter with Ms. Watson, was with her when he was born. Ms. Watson has told reporters that she discussed adoption with Mr. Spraggs, but he said he had no warning that less than two weeks after the birth, Ms. Watson would surrender Thomas for adoption.

"No one told me anything," Mr. Spraggs said. "When I found out he was gone, I called the police to see if they could help get him back, or file kidnapping charges or something, but they said there was nothing they could do because it was an adoption. By the time I heard about the registry, it was too late."

Although the Ohio registry gives men 30 days to file, a judge terminated Mr. Spraggs's parental rights when Thomas was 19 days old. After Mr. Spraggs hired a lawyer, the adoption agency returned Thomas to Ms. Watson, who now wants to raise him. A custody hearing in the case is scheduled for tomorrow.

Carol Sanger, a professor at Columbia Law School, said registries reflected a deep societal belief that unmarried fathers are irresponsible.

"If we want registries to mean anything," Professor Sanger said, "we'd have to teach them in every sex education curriculum in every school, and publicize them everywhere."

In Florida, the 2003 law creating the registry requires the State Department of Health "within existing resources" to distribute pamphlets on the registry at every office of the Health Department, the Department of Children and Families and the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

But when Barbara Busharis, a professor at Florida State University, sent students to find the brochures, they had no luck. "They couldn't find anyone who knew anything about the putative father registry," Professor Busharis said.

Mr. Jones's case illustrates the dangers of ignorance. The identity of his former fiancée is confidential, but Mr. Jones's court filings detail his struggle to prevent the adoption.

He tried to contact his ex-fiancée, who disappeared from his life when her parents took her from school and to another county. He called her friends, her brother, her pastor. He hired a Florida lawyer and filed a paternity petition the day before the baby was born, in the county where she previously lived. But that lawyer, now dead, apparently knew nothing of the putative father registry, and never mentioned registering.

Mr. Jones is appealing the termination of his rights. "I don't think there's any greater right that you could trespass on than a parent's right to his child," he said.

In her brief, Allison Perry, Mr. Jones's lawyer, called the Florida registry "a well-kept secret," with just 47 registrants for the 89,436 out-of-wedlock births in 2004. Mr. Jones, living in Arizona, had no reason to know of it. The adoption agency that alerted him to the pregnancy never mentioned it, and when the agency later sent him a letter, it enclosed information on a Florida registry for birth parents interested in a reunion when the children grew up, but nothing on the putative father registry.

Jeanne Tate, a lawyer for the adoption agency, said that because it represented the birth mother's interests, it could not advise Mr. Jones of his rights. Even the call to Mr. Jones went beyond the agency's legal obligations, she said.

"What's good about the law is that it provides clear guidance on whether a baby is or isn't free for adoption," she said, "so you don't get into those heart-wrenching situations where a baby who's been placed has to be removed."

Generally, fathers who have missed registry deadlines have lost their court cases. But Ms. Perry argues that the Florida law, applied as mechanically as in the Jones case, is an unconstitutional intrusion on men's fundamental rights.

"Jeremiah Jones did everything he could reasonably do to establish a relationship with his child," she said. "It's just inconceivable that the government can take away his child because he missed a filing deadline."

Detroit Free Press

March 20, 2006

TROY: Hearing will address day care restrictions

A public hearing begins at 7:30 p.m. today at City Hall, 500 W. Big Beaver Road, where residents can sound off about whether home child-care centers should be able to take in seven to 12 children.

While OK with the state, Troy does not allow home child-care providers to care for more than seven children at a time. The 19 homes in question have more than seven children.

The city began scrutinizing the group child-care homes more than a year ago after a neighbor of one of the providers complained about parking at the house.

By Cecilia Oleck

Scouts collect food for needy

Monday, March 20, 2006

By Aaron Foley
afoley@citpat.com -- 768-4944

They darted in and out of the buildings with lightning speed, up and down the stairs in seconds. The adults tried to keep up with them as best they could.

Five boys made their way around Abbey Villas Apartments in Jackson on Saturday collecting dry and canned goods for the Jackson Salvation Army. They had been collecting food around the county for weeks now; they'll donate more than 300 items to the charity today.

Although the five-member Boy Scout Troop 370 has only been in existence since last fall, they've made their presence known in Jackson.

"They're one of the smallest in terms of numbers, but one of the most active," said Scoutmaster Jon Ferguson, who works with other troops in the city.

Besides the food drive, the scouts have done other activities, such as learning about hunting, getting visits from local firefighters and police canine units and reinforcing religious beliefs.

"We learned how to make a pizza with all the toppings," said Malcolm Mayle, who's trying to become an Eagle Scout. The pizza's crust serves as the "foundation" of the family, the toppings represent the talents and the gifts of the family, and the cheese is what holds the family together.

"It's a recipe for a good Christian," said Stephen Doosey, who's also trying to earn Eagle Scout status.

Debbie Dangler is the troop's cubmaster and has a 10-year-old son, Jacob, and a 10-year-old grandson, Eddie, participating in the troop.

At first she got them involved because the Boy Scouts reinforce many of the values she believes in, such as honesty and kindness. But taking the role of cubmaster has been even more rewarding.

"I've learned to see things with a wider vision," Dangler said. "The things these young people accomplish amaze me."

Jackson resident Corrin Cardinale, whose son, Garren Hinton, is the youngest in the troop, likes that the troop keeps her son busy.

"They do a lot of neat things," she said. "It builds a lot of self-esteem for them."

Ferguson said there have been recent efforts to recruit more Boy Scouts in the city of Jackson. In the last year, he said seven city-based troops were started.

"I believe if Jackson's going to do any kind of community revitalization to affect a change, we have to offer something to the youth to keep their interest and spark their interest so they'll get involved in their community," Ferguson said.

Michigan Report

March 17, 2006

WELFARE CASELOADS DOWN, FOOD ASSISTANCE UP AGAIN

The number of families receiving cash assistance from the state decreased slightly in February, while the number of families who received Food Assistance Program aid rose for the fifth consecutive month, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 78,889 cases in February, down from 79,078 cases in January. The caseloads represented 213,313 persons receiving aid in February, also down from 213,997 in January.

In February there were 508,552 families receiving Food Assistance Program benefits, compared to 506,506 families in January. That compares with 502,981 in December, 498,935 households in November and 497,814 in October.

Childcare cases continued a decline that began after the holidays. The total caseload for that program was 61,890 in February, down from 63,028 in January, 64,720 in December and 64,700 in November. The February caseload represented 116,696 children.

Earned income cases remained at the same level they have been for the past two months, with 33 percent of those required to find work reporting income in February. The percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit has also held steady at about 13 percent since October.

Killing in Texas Spotlights Attacks on Social Workers

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: March 20, 2006

AUSTIN, Tex., March 19 — In six years as a social worker with the state's Child Protective Services, Holly Jones has been cursed, chased by dogs and run out of houses by angry parents. Threats are a daily part of the job for caseworkers who investigate accusations of child abuse and neglect and often remove children from their homes. But the killing of a social worker in South Texas last week has prompted Ms. Jones and her colleagues to re-evaluate the steps they take to keep safe and has raised questions about what the state can do to better protect them.

"We don't have weapons, we don't have training in self-defense, we didn't go through a police academy and we're dealing with the same people they are," Ms. Jones said.

The social worker who was killed last week, Sally Blackwell, 53, was found in a field in Victoria on Wednesday. Her family said she had received threats in her position as program director, overseeing several offices of caseworkers. The authorities have ruled the case a homicide but have not said whether her death was related to her job.

The killing comes a year after a woman fired a shotgun at two caseworkers who had come to her home near Alice, about 45 miles west of Corpus Christi, to investigate a child abuse complaint. The caseworkers fled. The woman was convicted in December of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Ms. Jones, 28, who recently became a supervisor for a Child Protective Services unit in suburban Austin, said caseworkers needed to know how to protect themselves.

A study released last week by the National Association of Social Workers found that 55 percent of 5,000 licensed social workers surveyed said they faced safety issues on the job. Sixty-eight percent of them said their employers had not adequately addressed their concerns. A survey in 2002 of 800 workers found 19 percent had been victims of violence and 63 percent had been threatened.

As the investigation into Ms. Blackwell's death continues, state protective services officials are thinking about ways to make the job safer, the Family and Protective Services commissioner, Carey Cockerell, said in an e-mail message to employees on Thursday.

Currently, social workers in Texas receive a half day of safety training, and the issue frequently comes up in a 12-week course, said a spokesman, Chris Van Deusen.

The child services department has no way of tracking how many threats its roughly 3,000 caseworkers receive, said Patrick Crimmins, spokesman for the Department of Family and Protective Services. But even people who have spent their entire careers with the agency can remember only a few instances in which threats escalated to violence, Mr. Crimmins said.

In 2001, Michigan lawmakers toughened the penalties for people who threaten or attack social workers after a child welfare caseworker was beaten, bound, gagged and suffocated while checking on a family. The law also required safety training for workers who make home visits.

The death of a Kansas mental health social worker prompted Representative Dennis Moore, Democrat of Kansas, to introduce a resolution last fall that would encourage state and local agencies to improve the safety of social workers. The resolution is pending.

Automatic raises not the way to go

The Grand Rapids Press

Saturday, March 18, 2006

The Michigan Democratic Party and AFL-CIO should drop their petition campaign for automatic increases in the state's minimum wage. Adoption of their proposed November ballot measure would have a devastating effect on small businesses, set back the state economy and deprive many individuals of much-needed jobs.

The ballot threat already has pushed Republican lawmakers to pass an ill-advised \$2.25 increase that will add to state economic and competitive problems. That should be enough for Democratic organizers of the petition drive. Governor Jennifer Granholm should tell them so.

The ballot measure would raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.85 next January and amend the Michigan Constitution to require annual increases indexed to inflation. The Legislature already has exceeded the petition's wage: Its bill raises the minimum to \$6.95 on Oct. 1, \$7.15 on July 1, 2007 and \$7.40 on July 1, 2008.

The major difference between the petition and the new legislation is the automatic increase feature and the writing of it into the constitution.

The minimum wage is a key element of a state's overall business climate and its ability to generate high and low-wage jobs. Michigan has seen net job losses in 2003, 2004 and 2005. In January, unemployment was 6.2 percent -- tied for fourth highest in the nation. The auto industry and other businesses are cutting and moving jobs. Republican lawmakers have rightly resisted raises previously but their proposed increase is far less burdensome than the constitutional route. While 17 states have set minimums above the federal rate, only Florida has it in its constitution. Florida also joins only Oregon, Washington and Vermont (2007) as states tying increases to inflation. Other states

recognize the negative impact such provisions would have on their economic future. Arguably, some increase is justified after nine years.

The new rate adopted by Michigan lawmakers is actually higher than the minimums in Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Those Midwest states only supported raises ranging from \$1 to \$1.35. Low-paying jobs are often entry-level positions. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, most minimum wage workers are under age 25.

Republicans, in voting through their wage increase, weighed the economic fallout and political risks. Polls showed the measure would pass significantly. The wage issue would likely trigger a high Democratic turnout. The timing of this initiative is no coincidence. Nor is it surprising that the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is lobbying hard for the proposal: It will raise the value or price of the labor available within the market.

This proposed ballot measure is shortsighted. The Michigan Constitution should be left to defining the basic structure and procedures of government. A higher minimum wage is a regulatory law that should be debated and decided by elected lawmakers, balancing needs. Also, a constitutional amendment, once adopted, would be difficult to change -- almost out of reach, in effect, of the democratic process in the state.

Democrats, the AFL-CIO and its member unions and Ms. Granholm should put the state's interest above their political interests. They should agree that the constitutional route is wrong and call off the campaign to steer the state that way.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

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LANSING



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New task force report suggests ways to reduce minority overrepresentation in state's child welfare system

WHAT:

Release of *"Equity: Moving toward better outcomes for all of Michigan's children."*
A report from Michigan's advisory committee of overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare.

Children of color are represented in the child welfare and juvenile justice caseloads far in excess of their proportion in the general population. In an effort to find answers as to why this is and how we can better serve children and families, DHS Director Marianne Udow and Skillman Foundation CEO Carol Goss co-chaired an advisory committee that has developed an action plan with recommendations on ways to reduce minority overrepresentation in the child welfare system.

WHEN:

Tuesday, March 21, 2006
Noon – 1:00 p.m.

WHERE:

Capitol Building
Room 428
Lansing, MI

WHO:

Speakers at this event include:
Marianne Udow, DHS director and ECIC board member
Carol Goss, CEO, Skillman Foundation
Linda Parker, director, Michigan Department of Civil Rights
Sen. Bill Hardiman
Rep. Rick Shaffer

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